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face above it turned half round
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*"As the blue satin cloak stepped in
face above it turned half round, and I:
Belinda."—P. 32.*

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LADY BONNIE'S EXPERIMENT

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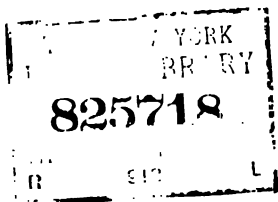
TIGHE HOPKINS

AUTHOR OF "THE NUGENTS OF CARRI-
CONNA," "THE INCOMPLETE
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LADY BONNIE'S EXPERIMENT.

CHAPTER I.

The Story of Clubbe's Hero.

S I stepped ashore at Dover the lady whose cloak I had picked up on the platform at Calais was immediately in front of me.

I have never seen a more elegant figure or a more admirable carriage. She was tall and slender, fair-haired and almond-eyed, and the dreamy expression that she wore agreed with the oval shape of her face.

The passage of the Channel had not discomposed her in the least ; she was as fresh, and her toilet was as scrupulous, as though she were just setting out for a little shopping in Bond Street. The gray silk traveling cloak, that had slipped from her hand as she descended from the train at Calais, was over her arm, and she carried besides a miniature portmanteau of crimson leather, on which were the initials, B. L. C. It struck me that she ought to be called Belinda.

I went to the buffet for a glass of Chanoinesse, which is the best of all restoratives after crossing, and when I made my way back to the train, the last of the passengers, the guard was holding open for me the door of a first-class carriage.

"I have a second-class ticket," I said, putting half a crown into his hand.

"It is a very fine day, as you say, sir," replied the guard, and he shut me in with the Lady Belinda.

She gave me a little smile as she inclined her head, in recognition doubtless of the trifling service I had rendered her two hours earlier.

"I hope you found the passage an easy one," I said, for I took her manner to mean that I might offer her some such conventional courtesy.

"Thank you ; I slept the whole way," said the Lady Belinda.

"I have never yet succeeded in doing so," said I, "but I would have given much to be able to sleep this morning."

"It is a tedious journey from Paris," said the Lady Belinda.

"I have traveled uninterruptedly from Sicily," said I.

"That is a long journey; but the traveling in Italy and Sicily is certainly less fatiguing than it was even a few years ago. To be sure, the express trains are not quite what they might be. The guards, however, have very nice manners."

"The guard of a Sicilian express," I said, "has always the air of being out for a holiday. He seems to conduct the train not so much for the purpose of getting it to its destination within the time set down in the books, as for the opportunities the journey affords him of meeting his friends and acquaintances at the various stations *en route*. He greets every station-master as a long-lost brother. He exchanges compliments with the policeman. He talks a little of politics with the wine and fruit seller at the stall.

He throws an appreciative eye over the scenery, and seems on the point of settling down to sketch it. Presently, as he remembers that the train is an express, he takes out his bugle, polishes it on the sleeve of his coat, and tootles a little on it in the style of a man who has a natural liking for music. The engine-driver awakes from his nap and sets the whistle blowing—rather for the sake of accompanying the guard than of giving warning to the passengers—and shortly afterward we move on toward the next stopping-place.”

“You have observed it all most minutely,” laughed the Lady Belinda. “I shall, no doubt, recall the description the next time I am in a Sicilian express. But it is tedious, of course, when one wants to accomplish the journey.”

She had a most musical voice, and the faintest perceptible difficulty with her *r*'s.

"Yes," I continued, "and I had absorbing reasons for traveling at the utmost speed. Unfortunately I am deficient in the Italian language, and could not well explain my desires to the guards. I am hurrying to London for the purpose of confirming my identity to the police."

"Indeed!" said the Lady Belinda, and she said nothing more.

"You have not, I dare say, had occasion at any time to compare the scientific mode by which the French police identify returned criminals, with the empirical and imperfect methods adopted in this country," I said.

"I have not the slightest idea what methods are employed in any country," said the Lady Belinda.

“Under the system invented by M. Bertillon of Paris,” I observed, “it is impossible for a returned convict to escape identification at the hands of the police. The system is based upon certain scientific measurements. There are parts of the body the dimensions of which never vary in the same individual after a certain age has been reached. The length and width of the head, the length of the left foot, the length of the middle finger of the left hand—there is, in effect, no variation in these when one has grown to full estate. The fixed and permanent character of these parts of the human frame is the basis of M. Bertillon’s invaluable system. The suspect is photographed, and his measurements are taken. Years afterward, perhaps, he comes up for identification again. The old photograph

may bear little resemblance to him ; he may have grown thin or stout, a trifle taller or a trifle shorter. But the dimensions of his skull are precisely what they were, and the length of the middle finger of his left hand ; and there are no two persons in the world whose measurements of head and finger are identical. The old offender cannot escape recognition, and the innocent prisoner, arrested on suspicion, cannot be wrongfully convicted. It is called the anthropometrical system."

"The an——"

"——thropometrical system."

"Thank you. And you are going to London to test it in your own case ?"

"I am compelled to do so, although the *systeme* Bertillon is yet scarcely developed in this country. The sympathy which your voice

expresses induces me to enlarge for a few moments upon the nature of the affair which has recalled me so hurriedly to England."

The Lady Belinda bowed.

"I have never known either father or mother," I said.

The Lady Belinda for one instant turned her almond-shaped eyes full upon me. They were violet eyes, and their glance was at once soft and searching. As I met the Lady Belinda's gaze, I paused in the narrative I had just begun. She withdrew her eyes from mine, and I continued :

"At the age of eighteen months I was abstracted from my mother's care, and conveyed secretly to the West Indies. A year after my birth my mother had been constrained into a second marriage, and my stepfather took an extreme dislike to me. It was by

his cruel order that I was stolen one night from my nurse's arms, and dispatched across the ocean, which, kinder than my stepfather, bore me without disaster to Kingston, in Jamaica. The stewardess of the vessel, who had taken a tender interest in me which I was not able to requite, placed me in charitable keeping, and I was well cared for. My youth was adventurous, and on the threshold of manhood I fell in love with the most beautiful Creole in Jamaica. She returned my passion, and it was then that I began to question myself anxiously about my birth, family, and rightful estate in the world. My inquiries, as you may suppose, went far beyond the limits of Jamaica—but perhaps I have already exhausted your interest ? ”

“ Please go on,” said the Lady Belinda.

“ You are still interested ? ”

“ Yes, indeed ! ”

“ Extremely ? ”

“ Extremely ! ”

“ Then I will continue. From the first officer of a vessel that touched for an hour at Jamaica I learned, by a singular accident, my whole history. My dear mother—of whom, naturally, I had preserved no recollection—was long dead. My cruel step-father survived her, and still lives. My mother had borne him one son, on whom thenceforward his whole affections were set, and in whose interests he was prepared, as you will learn, to scheme, plot, and act in the most desperate manner. The estates and vast wealth of my dear mother should pass at her death to her eldest son. I being supposed dead, they would devolve upon the son

whom she had given to my stepfather. Judge of his dismay when he learned that I lived, and was resolved to claim my own."

The Lady Belinda was regarding me now with an air of the liveliest interest. She sat back against the cushions of the carriage, her hands clasped, one foot protruding from her skirt in an open shoe of patent leather, which showed a green silk stocking.

"I was now," I continued, "to match my untutored wits against the wiles of my stepfather, a man most fertile in stratagems. A singular circumstance favored him from the outset. It appears that his son and I resemble one another so closely in face, figure, height, the color of the hair, and even in voice, that it is almost impossible to distinguish between

us. I was to be received, then, as an impostor, seeking to profit by this strange freak of nature. Happily, I found myself not without allies. The stewardess of the vessel that brought me to Jamaica is still living, and—far more important—the nurse from whose arms I was stolen in infancy. The whereabouts of these persons is not known to my stepfather, or I should tremble for their fate. He came, however, to know that their existence had been revealed to me, whereupon his plan was changed. Communications of the friendliest, the most affectionate nature reached me. All that my stepfather had been told concerning me was false, he declared. He had been beguiled, misled, cheated ; he was satisfied now of my identity, and longed to see and embrace me as a son, and to

restore me to my own. Enough that I was hopelessly deceived by these fair words. I prepared to set out for Europe, and took a tender farewell of my beloved Clara, for whose sake, much more than my own, I had engaged in this romantic and arduous enterprise."

"Is Clara the Creole?" the Lady Belinda asked, in a tone of the deepest interest.

"The same," I replied, "but—oh, Clara, Clara!"

"She is not——"

"I cannot say where or in what circumstances she is at this moment. She is lost to me, and there is but one person in the world who knows in what place she is. I need not tell you who that person is when I have said that there is a crime connected with her disappearance. But I

shall reach that part of my story in a moment. What I have now to narrate is so little in harmony with the age we live in that I fear you will hardly give it credence. Imagine a lonely village in the farthest wilds of Austria ; on the outskirts of the village an eyrie in the shape of an inn, hanging on a mountain's edge. In this forlorn retreat my stepfather had appointed me to meet him. He was in ill-health, he had informed me, and had been directed by his doctor to take a course of waters at this place. I met a man advanced in years, but of vigorous bearing, erect, and of great stature, with not a trace of weakness or disease upon him. My suspicions were instantly aroused, but little by little my stepfather's grace and kindness of manner overcame them. It was not until we had

talked far into the night that he suddenly laid bare a scheme by which I was to disown myself, my lawful name, and my whole rights during the life-time of his son, and return to the country I had left, in consideration of certain means to be furnished me by him. My refusal had scarcely passed my lips before I knew the terrible character of the man I had to deal with. I was unarmed, and in a few moments he had left me for dead in a cavern on the mountain side. I will not detail the story of my rescue by a wood-cutter, and the Christian care bestowed upon me by him and by his aged wife during the weeks in which I lay at the very gates of death. Yet another shock awaited me on my recovery. My Clara, whom I had left in Kingston, in despair at my silence, had followed

me to Europe and tracked me to Austria, where, on a sudden, she was seized and made a prisoner—by whose agency you may guess. My search for her led me last to Italy. I have reason to believe that my stepfather has very recently received the intelligence of my unlooked-for return to life ; hence my hurried journey from Italy to London. And now——”

The Lady Belinda had shifted her position within the last few moments, and was now bending forward with her eyes riveted upon mine, absorbed to all appearance by the story I was telling her. Something in her gaze arrested me ; her eyes were fixed on mine with an intensity of expression that held me motionless. I faltered in my speech, then came abruptly to a period. At one instant I seemed to be falling for-

ward, at the next the Lady Belinda seemed to rise from her seat and stand at a great height above me, still threatening me with her eyes. I heard her voice, as though she spoke to me at a distance of leagues.

“Yes,” she said, “and now?”

I heard and remember no more.

The guard shook me into consciousness at Victoria. The Lady Belinda had vanished.

CHAPTER II.

On the Staircase of the Garrick Theater.



HERE to, sir?" asked the driver, as, aided by a porter, I stumbled into the hansom he had called for me.

"The Turkish bath in Jermyn Street," and my voice seemed not to belong to me.

The bath restored me, and I drove to the club.

Sir Charles Coyne was on the steps.

"Hullo, Evesdon!" he said; "back from Italy?"

"Will you dine with me?" I answered.

“With pleasure ; and if you've no engagement later, we'll go to the theater. I've just secured a box at the Garrick.”

“Agreed. You shall tell me the news. You are always the best of Figaros. Meanwhile I will order dinner.”

We were at a corner table in the window, the pleasantest window in the dining room, on a fine warm evening in May. Coyne, who had been in town since the close of the shooting season, scarcely glanced at the street ; I, to whom the familiar pageant had a certain newness, for I had been four months in Italy, looked with interest at every passing carriage, and sought a friend or an acquaintance in every figure on the pavement.

When the turbot had followed the clear soup, and we were served

with a slice of venison, Sir Charles said :

“ I heard that you were to stay in Italy a month longer. What has brought you back ? ”

“ A curious little matter,” I replied. “ Has it not often struck you, Coyne, that my talents—to use no stronger word—have lacked substantial recognition ? Have you not often thought of me as the kind of person likely to be singled out for honor or reward in the will of some benevolent stranger—an elderly maiden for choice ? ”

“ There is no explaining the wills of eccentric old women,” returned my friend ; “ but I know of no particular reason why one of them should make a testament in your favor.”

“ Nevertheless, it has happened,” I said.

"What do you mean?"

"The late Miss Shiffner, of The Wild, in Surrey, scarcely a dozen miles from Hyde Park Corner, has bequeathed me by will that delightful little place."

"I never heard of the lady, or her place in Surrey. Are you sure there is no mistake?" said Sir Charles.

"That is where the romantic interest begins. There is, of course, no mistake whatever; but that is not the view taken by some of the late Miss Shiffner's relatives. You see, I did not know Miss Shiffner, and Miss Shiffner did not know me. So far as my knowledge goes, we never set eyes on one another. Is it not extremely interesting?"

"I make nothing of it," said Coyne. "What the deuce influenced Miss Shiffner, if there ever

was such a person, to bestow upon you, whom she never knew or saw, a property in Surrey, scarcely a dozen miles from Hyde Park Corner? Why did it not as easily occur to her to make me her legatee? *I* never knew Miss Shiffner either."

"In those circumstances," I said gravely, "for Miss Shiffner to leave this property to you, Coyne, would have been proof on her part of an eccentricity bordering on derangement of the reason."

"The argument seems scarcely less applicable to your own case," said Sir Charles.

"It is not applicable to my case at all. Miss Shiffner had read my book."

"Oh! Miss Shiffner had——"

"She had read, to her profit, my treatise on 'The Jacobean

Garden.' Do I begin to enlighten you?"

"My dear fellow, it is not to be denied that such things have happened. There are wills extant of which *le bon Dieu* himself would be puzzled to fathom the motives. If the will of Noah——"

"Which, in spite of Eusebius, is *not* extant," I replied.

"He had a good deal of ground to dispose of," said Sir Charles; "but let us return to Miss Shiffner, for I am still a little mystified."

"The matter is simplicity itself. Miss Shiffner, a lady of unusual endowments, read my work on 'The Jacobean Garden,' and was charmed with the ideal which I have there set up. She thought that this little property of hers in Surrey would provide me with the space necessary to create such a garden, on the antique model, as

I consider would be a proper example and reproof to all 'landscape gardeners' who are allowed to run wild over the country. This has been a favorite project of mine for years. Miss Shiffner, in the solemn moment of making her will, is inspired to assist me to its realization."

"And the relatives?"

"The relatives apparently see no reason to interfere with the landscape gardeners. Rather, I think, that they are quite indifferent to the subject. Landscape or formal gardening, it is all one to them. Such people would naturally be puzzled by, and even unfriendly toward, a will of this nature."

"Naturally!" said Sir Charles.

"There is also a niece in the case."

"Ha! Where does the niece come in?"

“As far as I have been able to gather, The Wild was originally bequeathed to her ; or it was thought by the relatives that it should have been hers.”

“Ah ! Will to be contested on the ground of irresponsibility of testatrix. My dear Evesdon, you will not be laying out your Jacobean garden just yet.”

“I might approve of the niece, myself, you see ; in which event I should not think of going to law with her,” I replied.

“You had better leave the litigation to the other side,” said Sir Charles. “Well, this is what has brought you over, I suppose. What sort of a journey had you ?”

“From Palermo to Paris, and from Paris to Dover, it was without interest. From Dover to London it was a unique experience. Shall

we have coffee here or in the smoking room ? ”

“ A unique experience ? We’ll go to the smoking room, I think. A ‘ unique ’ experience of yours would hardly involve a woman, I should say.”

“ In this instance the experience *was* a woman.”

“ Let me have it on the spot,” said Sir Charles.

We gained my own particular corner of the smoking room, which was unoccupied, exchanged cigars, and I was still hesitating over my story.

“ Begin,” said Coyne ; “ begin ! ”

“ I had dined with Clubbe the night before I left Paris,” I said.

“ He was at work on a new piece for the Adelphi, and insisted on telling me the whole of his interminable plot ; five acts, and six tableaux. You shiver ; I did